

ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT

The vision of the Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology Polish Academy of Sciences is to become one of the leading centres of competence in Central Europe specializing in neurobiological research. The Institute aims to achieve this ambitious goal by more effective integration into the European Research Area (ERA) as a valuable partner in basic and applied research. The Nencki management team is aware that for such integration to be effective, the Institute needs to maximize the support provided to individual scientists in their mobility and in all phases of international project preparation and implementation. The Institute leadership recognizes, that while it cannot offer competitive salaries for its scientific staff compared to those offered in research institutions in Western Europe or Scandinavian Member States, it can offer much flexibility and ability to launch an independent research career to young scientists, while providing direct access to cutting edge research infrastructure, financed from EU Structural Funds. In addition, the Institute aspires to capitalize on its favourable location on the Warsaw Ochota Research Campus. The Campus represents the biggest concentration of scientific institutions conducting research in biology, biomedicine, and bioinformatics in Poland. The strategic goals set to assure continued development and competitiveness of the Institute are reinforced by active engagement in joint Ochota Campus initiatives to establish multi-disciplinary international PhD training programmes, such as the International PhD Studies in Neurobiology financed from the Innovative Economy Operational Programme by the Foundation for Polish Science, as well as a very proactive approach to securing external funding, particularly from EU sources such as FP7 projects, Structural Funds, and joint research projects based on bi-lateral agreements between Poland and its international partners and stronger emphasis on aspects of applied research with immediate and measurable benefits for a wider group of stakeholders, the society, and/or with identifiable impacts in health care or the economy.

The Nencki Institute is involved in active scientific collaboration with 75 foreign research institutions from all over the world, conducting research on 112 different research topics. The Institute is a member of 8 international multi-partner projects consortia. The primary drivers of most Nencki collaborations are individual research group networks and scientific interactions at meetings and conferences. It is further enhanced by capacity building projects such as the 3.5M euro FP7 "regional potential" project BIO-IMAGINE (2011-2013). In developing their research scientists are seeking to work with the best people, institutions and equipment which complement their research, wherever they may be, though geographical and linguistic coverage is also taken into account when selecting partner institutions. Nencki has not defined any geographical priorities for partnerships. However, in the past the emphasis has been on European countries as well as on the leading research centres in the United States. These strategies appear to be working very effectively. According to the European Commission 2011 Innovation Union Competitiveness Report 2011, the Nencki Institute was among the elite group of five leaders securing EU funding in FP7 in Poland.

International cooperation and mobility of the researchers is also enhanced by organization and participation in various scientific events. During the past 4 years the Nencki Institute organized or co-organized 7 national and 27 international conferences. The Institute is actively involved in the "Mobility Plus" program, implemented by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, enabling researchers to participate in studies in reputable international research centres under the supervision of eminent scientists of international standing in the field. Teaching and mobility at the Nencki Institute is always based on research. We are a member of the consortium for a joint program of 2nd and 3rd Cycle studies, financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and implemented by the Warsaw University in partnership with the units of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The project aims at increasing mobility of PhD students and strengthening job opportunities for graduates. It is composed of a scholarship program for graduate students and young doctors, placing them in leading research centres and foreign companies and inviting the lectures of professors from top universities abroad. An important element of the project is an extended module of entrepreneurship education. Joint programmes are regarded as a means to deepen and intensify existing collaborations, which is both welcomed and encouraged within the Nencki Institute. They are also a means to raise the attractiveness of Polish and European science among third countries and to provide Poland and Europe with highly qualified research staff.

The Nencki Institute continues to be very successful in applying for external funding. Recently it has been involved in over 20 international projects, including FP6, FP7 and others. The Institute is one of the leading research institutions in the region which is evidenced by an excellent publication record (well over 100 peer-reviewed publications on the ISI list and over 2000 citations annually, 10 of 35 Polish most-cited biologists) as well as by national and international collaborations. The Institute participates in numerous national and international teaching programmes in fundamental and applied science, providing the highest quality training and laboratory experience for more than 130 students in an international environment. These students can become highly qualified experts, with a broad research horizon, prepared to cope with the latest technologies. Special programmes include International PhD Studies in Neurobiology and Increasing Human Capital (European Social Fund) doctorate program. The Institute also supports its students to attend training courses organized by EMBO, FEBS and EMBL. The Institute carries out applied research and collaborates to this end with national and international industry partners. Currently five ambitious projects are financed by the National Centre for Research and Development, two spin-off companies are being established and the number of patents filed has quintupled over the last three years.

The Institute is the first research institution in Poland to be awarded the prestigious HR Excellence in Research badge, which signifies that it complies with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

The Institute established the Office of International Cooperation and Project Management which facilitates and coordinates planning, drafting and submitting applications for international projects in teaching and training. The Office also supports project management and reporting.

We intend to achieve:

1 - Increasing attainment levels to provide the graduates and researchers Europe needs

The Nencki Institute's participation in the Programme will certainly make it more interesting for the prospective students. The Institute envisages that this will attract many people who otherwise would not pursue higher education degrees at the Institute or elsewhere. In addition, the academic degrees awarded by our Institute will be perceived as more valuable in the job market. Therefore once enrolled, students will be stronger motivated to complete their degrees, hence their drop out rates should decrease.

2 - Improving the quality and relevance of higher education

Participation in the Programme will naturally advance the quality of education at the Nencki Institute. It will equip our graduates with the knowledge and core transferable competences they need to succeed in high-skill occupations, in academia, private sector and elsewhere. These matters are further discussed below.

3 - Strengthening quality through mobility and cross-border cooperation

The staff and students of the Nencki Institute will be able to work and study at higher education institutions in other countries. Conversely, staff and students from abroad will work and study at our Institute. The ensuing exchange of ideas is guaranteed to improve the quality of teaching and research at the Nencki Institute by providing new concepts, training in skills not currently available at the Institute, and supporting the development of new study themes and research topics.

4 - Linking higher education, research and business for excellence and regional development

The students at the Nencki Institute will be eligible for placements in non-academic institutions, such as private businesses and research companies. This will provide them with invaluable experience regarding the functioning of business and research enterprises. Subsequently our graduates will find it easier to work in the private sector, and conversely, private companies will benefit from employing our graduates as they will be very valuable workers. These links with businesses will also be explored in other ways. For example, we envisage that they will help us in translating our research to practical applications.

5 - Improving governance and funding

Thanks to the Institute's participation in the Programme, our administrative staff will be able to enroll in courses and other forms of international exchange. The knowledge and expertise gained in that way will assist in more efficient governance of our Institute. New funding opportunities will naturally develop as a result of improved ties with businesses and foreign higher education institutions. For example, it will be easier to identify foreign partners to apply for collaborative research grants.